

WorkWell

A Deloitte podcast series to empower your well-being



Resilient Leadership in Times of Change and Challenge

Today, leaders are facing new challenges to the mental and emotional health of their teams. Though many physically or virtually show up to work, health challenges may prevent them from fully engaging in their work responsibilities – an effect called presenteeism. The Partnership for Workplace Mental Health reports that workers with depression and anxiety lose an average of two hours of productivity daily, for a total cost of \$180 billion annually to the US economy. And this was calculated before the global COVID-19 pandemic. This reinforces that outwardly someone can look fine, because we can't always see how someone feels. So, what skills do leaders need to reengage with our work, our workplace, and our workforce to emerge from this crisis stronger than ever before?

Hi, I'm Jen Fisher, Chief Well-being Officer for Deloitte and I'm so pleased to be here with you today to talk about all things well-being. I'm here with Janet Foutty. She is the Executive Chair of the Board at Deloitte in the US. Janet is a passionate advocate for inclusion and well-being in the workplace, Women in Technology, and STEM education. You can find Janet in Ella the Engineer, a comic book series created to showcase a young female role model with a passion for science, technology, engineering, math, and entrepreneurship. She serves on several nonprofit boards, including Bright Pink, which is dedicated to women's health. She previously served as Chair and CEO of Deloitte Consulting.

Janet Foutty: I'll start by saying that my career is definitely one that has not been guided by a plan. Far from it. I really believe that how you grow up is incredibly important in terms of how you think about your career. So, I think a lot about my family and how I was raised as I think about my own career, and just a couple things I would highlight there. My parents both finished their academic careers in fields that were wildly different than the decisions that they made in terms of how they wanted to spend their lives. And they actually went through many, many, many years of education and decided they did not like their chosen fields. From the very beginning, as I started to think of my career was always to be defined by things that gave me energy, things that I felt good about and things that I enjoy doing, which was very much the conversation around our dinner table growing up. So, for me, my career at Deloitte was not guided by a plan, but was I liking what I'm doing? Was I doing it with interesting people? Was I valued and was I able to have a life that was fulfilling from a number of dimensions? So, as I started my career right out of business school, I went in without a lot of high expectations for what the end state would be. I spent the bulk of my career serving clients in financial services and in government, always in helping our clients through really large complex transformations that were enabled by technology. So that's sort of the core of how I grew up. I always had tremendous passion around the people side of our business and really thinking about why people join the organization, what gave them good experiences, what made great leaders, how do we think about inclusive workforce? Those sets of things were always of interest to me and sort of running in the back of my head as I was busy out and about serving my clients. And frankly, it's actually that interest that really led me to be able to have really broad leadership responsibilities over the course of my career. So, that sort of interest in the human

dimensions of things from a leadership perspective was critical in an organization that really is all about the people, attracting the right people, and motivating them to have really productive careers, both for myself and for the organizations that I've had the privilege and responsibility to lead and run. It has been all about creating an environment where the well-being of our people is front and center. But I found that my personal chapters and my well-being in those chapters very much mirrored them, from being newly married when I joined the organization, to having twins, which was definitely a twist-and-turn for many years with many chapters, to facing some serious illness myself, to my daughter struggling with some serious illness, to the underlying thread and theme of family and my personal well-being being sort of undercurrents that ran through.

Jen: This concept of work-life integration, which we talk about often at Deloitte and certainly in the world of well-being, and we all know it isn't easy and it has evolved over time. How did you find what works for you? And then most importantly, how did you advocate for what you needed, when you were earlier in your career and then how has that evolved, even now?

Janet: I would say that the integration between my personal life and my professional life has been really different in every chapter. That would be sort of guiding theme one. And I'll give a couple examples of that, if helpful. The second is that I've always been really good at creating boundaries. And then the third, which you hinted on, is about advocacy, and that's both advocacy for yourself as well as advocacy for others. And it's funny when I look back, work-life integration at the start of my career isn't something I thought about a lot, but I was newly married. My husband had pulled up roots. He was raised in a small Midwestern city, very close to his family. When we got married, he quit his job and moved to Chicago, so we could start our life here as my career with Deloitte was starting in Chicago. And that was a really big deal to his family that he quit a job without having another one, was unheard of. Frankly that he was moving to support my career was maybe a little bit different for his family and the environment he'd grown up in. So, one of the things that I very gently raised early in my career was that it would be really terrific if my first project assignment could be local, because my husband had uprooted his entire life to move. And at the time, I did not think about that as self-advocacy. I wasn't thinking about work-life integration. I was just thinking about him sitting in our apartment by himself, knowing almost no one in Chicago, and me being gone five days a week, which is how we were traveling at the time. So, that was my very first foray into advocating for myself and what was important for me. And maybe it was my cluelessness about what the norms were, since I didn't grow up in a business environment that allowed me to have the courage to do that. And my first project, by the way, was in town and was local. And that did give him time to get settled in and then out and about. So, that was a really simple example of early in my career of what mattered. In every chapter, it's been incredibly different, with newborn twins, as you can imagine. I was in a place where I needed consistency. That was what was the most important, was consistency of schedule, consistency of routine in some form or fashion. And frankly, not being on an airplane in that chapter. When I was ill it was also about being home. When my kids were in junior high and high school, it was really important for me to have more dinners home than away in any given week. So, you know because you've heard me talk about it recently, fitness is something that's always been really important to me in terms of how I get energy. My girlfriends and I would go to the gym in our late eighties, early nineties, bad workout clothes and hairstyles, which are quite hilarious. When I finished my first in-town project, after my husband and I were newly married and I found myself, I'm on the road, I'm out of town. There were only a couple of us who were traveling. We were traveling to New York and my project manager, who I was working for, was the only other person traveling. And this guy liked to work long days, which I was very comfortable with, but he liked big, long meals as well. So, we would finish working at the client, you know, 7:30, eight o'clock and we would go for a many, many, many course meal. And I found that my workout routine was incredibly disrupted and there was

certainly no way when I got back to the hotel room at 10 o'clock at night that I was going to work out. And so that's the point in my life where I became a morning workout person. I sort of made myself become a morning person because I quickly found that fitness was important to me. It wasn't working into his routine. So, I adapted to become a morning workout person. And to this day, every morning bright and early before I engage in frankly any other dimension of my life, I spend some time in some form or fashion in physical activity.

Jen: My big takeaway is that you were innovating around work-life integration before it was actually a thing, which is no surprise knowing you. You spoke about not necessarily knowing at the time that it was advocacy for yourself and your own well-being, but now, you know. So, what advice do you have for our listeners? Because I do think that it is still difficult for people to advocate for their well-being with their leaders in their organizations.

Janet: So, a couple of quick things I would have in terms of advice. The first is to be really clear about what's important to you. And that sounds really, trite and trivial, Jen, but, I'm not positive that when I started my career, and frankly in many chapters, that I've taken the time to take a step back and think about what it is that's important and to be really clear about it in my own mind. So, that would be the first thing is actually clarity on what is important, so that you use your advocacy and conversation for the things that really matter. The second is to be clear about solutions in addition to problems. So, you know, everything is simple for me. If I go back to my moving my workouts from the evening to the morning, which is such a simple example, not so simple at 5:30 am, but such a simple example generically, but I'm being clear with my project manager that this was something that was important to me, and I understood dinner and the time to decompress the day and talk about what had happened was important to him. So, to come not just with the problem but also with how you're going to think about solving for it. But the third and maybe most important, is being an empathetic listener yourself. People like to talk about what's important to them and that creates the space for you to talk about what's important to you. So those are a handful of things that that I think could be helpful and you have to just do it in a way that you're comfortable with and that makes sense for you.

Jen: Yeah, and certainly resonates with me. You can't see me, but I was smiling ear to ear. That is great advice that I think I've learned the hard way along the way. I'm sure it's advice that somebody gave me and I chose not to listen but had to come crashing into it myself, as a leader, but also as somebody who at various times in my career has needed the incredible support of others. I had to ask for that and create that same space for them in order to get the support that I needed. I think that when we know other people have our back, we have their back and that's kind of the way that it works, right?

Janet: I'd like to just share a quick story about that if I may. As we've talked about early in my career, I was always comfortable, maybe in my own quirky way in creating the space and asking me what was important. But I had a really pivotal moment that I'd love to share because it reflects so much on something you just said about why I've really changed my sort of dynamic as a broad leader to that end. As a leader of my own teams, I was always comfortable having give-and-take discussions with my teams about what was important to them. That came really naturally to me. But as I stepped into broader roles and larger leadership roles, I was not as comfortable in sharing my own vulnerabilities and what was important for me in order to create the space, especially when I was leading really large businesses. And I had an experience that really changed my mindset around that. It was when I was ill, which is almost a decade ago. I was diagnosed with breast cancer and I had just, within a few days of learning that health diagnosis, been offered a really big step-out leadership role. I was delighted, as you can imagine, but I told my boss at the time, that I just had this diagnosis and here's what I thought the treatment was

going to look like. And if that meant that he didn't want me to take the role that I would absolutely understand because I was going to be in a place where I couldn't do the job at my normal pace for a number of months. And he was unbelievable on one dimension, but I also learned a ton in another. So, he said, absolutely, you should take the role and we will figure out how to support you, and do not worry whatsoever, the role is yours. But then in closing the conversation, and I think this was said, I know this was said, with absolutely positive intent, he said, but I'd recommend that you not share with anyone on what you're going through, keep it between you and I, was essentially what he was saying. And he really was saying that from a place of, I think, trying to support me the best way he knew how, and I didn't think anything of it. I said, okay, he's smart guy and has been a good leader. And so, I followed his counsel and I shared it a little bit, but not on any broad scale. And over the years, as I reflected on that advice and I saw others going through similar things, I decided that that was advice that, though generous in spirit, was misguided. The support I could have gotten from my professional network, frankly, the lack of questions about "why wasn't she there" and "why wasn't she on her "A" game" would have been much more clear and easy to answer. And would have created a shared space for others to then have the courage to talk about the things that they were going through. Maybe that's the most important. So, Jen, this idea of the ability to have the conversation, whether it's between you and I about what you need and how I can help you, or whether, for me, it's using the privilege I have of the much greater megaphone right now to share my experience sets so that others can one, understand that their leaders are by no means perfect, that we all go through hard things, but also to create the space for them to talk about what they're going through and frankly, to ask for what's important to them, to tie it back to your question.

Jen: My listeners know that I'm a breast cancer survivor as well. And what you may or may not remember is the conversation that you and I had when I was diagnosed early on. And much of what you just said and much of what you told me at that time shaped my own beliefs and my own actions around sharing my story and being open at the time and using my role as the well-being leader as a platform. So, I don't know if I ever thanked you for that, but now I'm thanking you publicly.

Janet: So, I remember the discussion very well and I remember the resources I connected you to, sort of a shared set of resources for us, but I'm really, really touched that that was so impactful for you.

Jen: We've talked generally about well-being and your passion for fitness and work-life integration. I want to move into another topic that I know you're passionate about because you are a passionate advocate for mental health and resilience. So why is this so important to you?

Janet: So, it's funny, Jen, you and I have been talking for a while about this topic and how we create the real space collectively to have this conversation. You know, one side of my family really has grappled with mental health over the years, and so that's something I grew up with in terms of the things that I observed. But interestingly, it was never the centerpiece of the conversation and frankly it was rarely discussed. And, so it's only recently that I've actually thought about the fact that it wasn't part of the conversation and whether life would have been different for my family members who grappled with mental health if the conversation had been more public, even around our dinner table. We now know, something very different than what we knew in the seventies and eighties, is that one in five us adults experience mental illness every year. So, if I bridge my personal experience and that statistic to that of our workforce, you know, we have over a hundred thousand people within our terrific firm. And if you think about that statistic, whether we're at, above, or even slightly below that average, it is an incredible number of people who are grappling with this very difficult, often invisible, disability or disease. And, so I can't tell you how pleased I am, at the end of the day, that they can be wildly successful no matter

what dimension of struggle they bring into work, is incredibly important. The mindset used to be, and we talk about this on a number of dimensions of inclusion because I do believe mental health has an inclusion dimension to it, but this idea that you leave your problems or you leave yourself at home. I remember a discussion early in my career that was about the parts of your personality that you could show at work and those that you couldn't. And I think about the topic of health and well-being and mental health and well-being is one that used to be entirely compartmentalized and kept very private. And you know, at the end of the day, we live with our problems every minute, every hour, every day, whether that's at home or work. And the ability to open the conversation and, maybe most importantly, reduce the stigma is one of the reasons really that I'm so impassioned about this topic.

Jen: We are making incredible strides as a society, certainly as an organization, but there's still so much work to do. So, having leaders like you that are passionate about it, that are advocating for it and they're speaking openly about it, I think is so important to the work that we're trying to do. So, we hear the word resilience, and perhaps a lot more frequently today, and I know this is something that you've talked about for a while and you talk about it a lot now as well. Can you just tell us real quickly how you define resilience?

Janet: So, I do feel like there's a handful of words that, you know, that I use a lot more now than I did 10 weeks ago. And resilience is one of them. So, as I was thinking about it, Jen, before our last town hall that I co-hosted a couple of weeks ago, I went and looked up the definition to make sure I was really using it the way it should be used. And luckily, it's a place where I believe how I've been using it does match because it's really simple, which is the ability to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions or changing conditions. And so, when you think about where we find ourselves today, the ability to work through right now obviously the very difficult and, in many cases, tragic, to being able to withstand or recover quickly from a health situation. And maybe it's a little bit dangerous when you tie it to health because some health situations are not recoverable quickly, but the ability to withstand or navigate through difficult conditions. So, in my mind it's both broad in how you navigate the situation you find yourself in, that's at the world coming at you, which is how I think about this unprecedented time, or whether it's something you're going through personally, whether it is mental health, broad health and well-being, things happening to your family and/or in your communities, those things that are very personal, the ability to navigate through those is so important. So, this in my mind is the ultimate test of resiliency in leadership because there are so many dimensions of how each of us is dealing with this crisis that we find ourselves in. And there are many things that are different about our own makeup as well as our families. But there are also many, many things that are the same. The attribute that I feel that has sort of transcended this entire discussion we've had today is listening and adapting and, you know, everything from sort of how I've navigated my career, to how I've navigated my personal life and the relationships in my personal life, to how I find myself as a leader today, is about really listening intently to what the signals around me and those that are around me asking the right smart questions that help draw out the insights from the conversation and then being able to adapt and course correct. And so, I, I feel I was incredibly fortunate to have grown up at a dinner table where listening was important and asking the right questions was viewed as important. Being raised by a scientist, that sits at its core to sort of a core attribute of being a great consultant, is really listening to what's going on with your clients, to being a great mom, to being an effective leader in a time of crisis, is really about listening, and clueing into the signals so that you can help your teams be as resilient as possible.

Jen: So, what do you do when you're having a down day? Because let's face it, we're, we're all having down days and we need permission to have those down days. So, what does that look like for you?

Janet: So, it's funny, I would say that I haven't really experienced down days, but I have down moments. Which is maybe different than before this crisis where you could have a day where you look back and you'd say, wow, that was really a mediocre day or a down day. I find that I'm sort of on this constant sort of sine wave of up and down. I got told very early in my career, "Janet, you can't let the highs get you too high or have the lows get you too low" as a piece of advice, I got my very, very, very first moment out of school. And I feel like in this moment that we're in now, it's really hard not to let the lows get you too low and, and frankly, the highs, you have to look maybe a little bit harder for them. I find each day is much more of a roller coaster than it is normally. I'm not sure I have any blinding insight here, except for to look for the small things, and to enjoy the small things, and remind myself of the small things. I'm doing something very different, Jen you will laugh about this. I have lunch blocked on my calendar every day now and there's basically a sign on my calendar that says, unless this is entirely out of our control, please do not block meetings here. And I literally have not taken lunch since I was like 22 years old and I'm well above that today. And so one of those lunch days, my mom, who lives outside of Washington, DC, and I do a walk around our neighborhood with our cameras on and we show each other the gardens that we're seeing in our neighborhoods and we just catch up on the happenings of the week. So, that's always a real bright spot for me. I'm doing lots of cooking and baking. I'm reading a lot. So, I try to look for those, for those little things that give me energy personally and then I look for the little things that give me energy professionally. A great conversation with a team, leaning back into a conversation with a client that has nothing to do with the situation that we find ourselves in. I just try to look for those little things that give me energy to keep moving. And then maybe the last thing is I bought a jump rope. I grew up jumping rope. My best girlfriend and I jumped rope all through college as our fitness activity. I bought a jump rope a few weeks ago and jumping rope for 10 minutes can give you an unbelievable burst of energy. But it's really, really tiring! And you can't jump right on to Zoom after. I built myself back up to about 25 minutes, but it is not for the faint of heart. It is definitely not for the faint of heart.

Jen: Is there anything that you have learned recently because of COVID-19 and helping to lead Deloitte through this crisis that will change you into the future as a leader as well?

Janet: So probably two things that have stayed the same. The one is listening, which we've talked about quite a bit today and the second is the importance of taking care of each other, and whether that's taking care of my board and my board members to taking care of my broader set of colleagues. So, those two things maybe have been reinforced through this crisis. The thing that is sort of much more transcendental is my role as the chair of the board of our fabulous firm that just crossed our 175th year this year, is that my absolute job and responsibility is to take care of the long-term health of our business. And with that, the long-term health of our people. And this has just shined an enormous spotlight on that. And then the thing that's probably changed the most, Jen, is focus on safety. And safety hadn't been a word I'd used much, over the course of my career, to be honest with you. Now I know some of that is most of the industries that I've participated in aren't industries where safety is a core value that we talk about all the time. I've served some clients who serve in businesses where safety is an incredible core value, but it wasn't a core value for us or many of the clients that I serve. And this idea, not just of health and well-being, but of the safety of our people is something that I've really shifted my mindset around and I think will live with me forever because it is something that frankly, I'm not sure we talked enough about previously and should be much more the center of the conversation. Hopefully not dominating the conversation as it is rightly so today but be an important dimension of how I lead going forward.

Jen: My final question for you, Janet. What are your hopes for the future of well-being, mental health and resilience in organizations as we move past this current crisis that we're in into our next normal?

Janet: So, I hope that the goodness that comes out of this really complicated time that we're in accelerates the discussion that, Jen, under your incredible leadership within our organization and outside our organization because you've touched so many, is that this is an accelerant to the ability to both talk about health and well-being and mental health and resilience, but it also creates a different space for those topics. The empathy that we show for each other around what makes each of those things tick for each of us. That we create the space for them and that every leader views it as part of their responsibility. And everyone sort of has this mindset of taking care of each other as a much more important part of how we thrive as a society and as an organization. So, Jen, when I think about the work that you've been doing on our behalf and continuing to open my eyes to the conversation that we've been having today and the importance of the transparency of directness of the conversation. That's really what I hope for is that we accelerate all of that.

Jen:

I'm so grateful Janet could be with us today. As leaders at work and at home, we all have the opportunity to help our teams, families, and communities develop resiliency in the face of change and challenge. Thank you to our producers and our listeners. You can find the WorkWell podcast series on deloitte.com or you can visit various podcatchers using the keyword WorkWell, all one word, to hear more. And if you like the show, don't forget to subscribe so you get all of our future episodes. If you have a topic you'd like to hear on the WorkWell podcast series or maybe a story you would like to share, please reach out to me on LinkedIn, my profile is under the name Jen Fisher, or on Twitter @jenfish23. We're always open to your recommendations and feedback and of course if you like what you hear, please share posts and like this podcast, thank you and be well.

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